

Introduction to “Juan César García interviews Juan César García”

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When Everardo Duarte Nunes published *Social Sciences and Health in Latin America OPS/CIESCU* in 1986, he used as an introduction this last work of Juan Caesar García. “*Juan César García interviews Juan César García*” was published on June 3, 1984, just a few days before García’s death and synthesizes the development of social sciences in health in Latin America as well as the role that international organizations played in that development.

This self-interview leaves us with a testimony of García’s foundational work over twenty years in both theoretical and practical activity, in the diffusion of his thought in a collective form and in his collaboration with a great number of young scientists who emerged in Latin America’s universities.

Rereading the interview, we can see how Juan César in his work and his daily activity went beyond academic analysis to act as physician, sociologist, historian and social thinker. This is the conclusion of Everardo Duarte Nunes when analyzing the contributions of Juan Caesar to social sciences in health.¹

Juan Cesar García’s questions allow us to measure the wealth of his answers. In this scientific overview García considered issues still relevant today. These include the debates

among various disciplines over how to name this particular field of study, the different methodologies used to study it, and the creation of a theoretical model which will support the methodologies of social medicine.

Equally important is the question; “What is the history and the meaning of the term social medicine? Garcia’s answer is a historical synthesis beginning in 1848 with the great revolutionary movements in Europe, especially in Germany, England, France and Italy, and the ideological limitations that blocked their extension to America.

His questions and answers then trace the pathways of social medicine in different Latin American countries beginning in 1940 and the involvement of international organisms like the Millbank and Rockefeller Foundations, PAHO/WHO, and UNESCO.

The discussion concerning the separation in Latin America between preventive medicine and social medicine clarifies the – still unresolved - debate among health workers, sociologists and anthropologists concerning the adoption by some university centers of the American model of “behavioral sciences” as an alternative to the approach developed by social medicine. As García points out, this debate allowed for health workers and sociologists to partially overcome their theoretical differences after the Cuenca meeting in 1972.

At the close of this self-interview García discusses the role of the international organizations as products of ideology and of

Received July 7, 2007

Accepted July 21, 2007

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No conflict of interest declared

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knowledge. His explicit answer is the following:

PAHO “does not” generally create at the scientific and technical level; rather it disseminates “ideas” or procedures that improve the physical and mental potential of human beings. It follows that the resources that it has and uses are those that would allow for the dissemination or adaptation of already existing “ideas” or artefacts. The most frequently used tools for achieving these goals are: scholarships, meetings, consultancies, certain supporting material, and (small) subsidies. The “arrangement” or the combination of resources and mechanisms “could” lead to adaptation or dissemination. In this case we

might speak of a “theory” and of a methodology. It would “appear” that the PAHO does not explicitly have a theory of dissemination to facilitate their efforts.

Q: Does it then work by intuition?

A: Not necessarily...

June 3, 1984. Juan Cesar García²

References

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2. García, J.C. 1984. Manuscript. Havana, Cuba. Center of Documentation MARCERE.

